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12. THE RUFOUSTAILED FLYCATCHER, *MUSCICAPA RUFICAUDA* IN BHARATPUR, RAJASTHAN

At about 9.30 a.m. on the 28 September 1984, I saw a solitary Rufoustailed flycatcher flying about amongst the foliage of a *Ficus religiosa* tree in the heart of the Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur. The bird was smaller than a sparrow and superficially quite similar to the Brown flycatcher *Muscicapa latirostris*. It was plain dull brown above with ashy underparts. The eyes were large with a faint white eyering and when I looked at it intently with my 10 x 35 binoculars, I could make out the blackish legs and the flesh coloured lower mandible. Identification was rendered positive due to the presence of a rufous rump and tail which were conspicuous especially in flight.

The bird was observed for about 20 minutes as it restlessly flitted about the foliage in the upper canopy of the tall tree. It never launched a typical flycatcher-like sally but instead foraged by moving about only within the canopy and boughs.

The flycatcher was obviously on its south bound, autumn passage as the INDIAN HANDBOOK (compact edition, p. 490) says that it breeds in the western Himalayas and winters in the evergreen tracts of south western India. This happens to be the first record of the occurrence of this species at Bharatpur. The "Checklist of the birds of Delhi, Agra and Bharatpur" (Abdulali & Panday 1978) indicates that the species has been dubiously recorded in the Delhi area.

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13. ON THE IDENTITY OF THE EASTERNMOST RACE OF *PRINIA CRINIGER* (HODGSON) IN INDIAN LIMITS

In 1924 Stuart Baker described *Suya* (now *Prinia*) *criniger assamica* from Shillong, Assam, and said the distribution was south and east of the Brahmaputra, and in the Chin Hills. It was said to be much darker brown than *criniger* Hodgson, the nominate form

from Nepal and *striatula* (Hume, Karachi) from the west, almost as dark as *yunnanensis* and to have the head boldly streaked, even in the breeding plumage.

Deignan, 1942 accepted all three races from India, without comment, and followed them

up with *catharia* (Reichenow, Tatsieng-lu-ting in Setschuan), *parumstriata* (David and Oustalet, Fukhien) and other races from further east and south.

Ripley, 1961, in the first edition of SYNOPSIS, referred to Assam birds as *yunnanensis* (Harington). Then in 1973 (with Sálím Ali) changed over to *catharia* (which was said to include *yunnanensis*, *assamica* and Koelz's *nebulosa*, from Cherrapunji, Khasi Hills), without giving any reason or explanation. This is repeated in the second edition of SYNOPSIS (1982).

In the course of cataloguing the Bombay Collection, the large series from Simla accepted as of the nominate form, showed some differences in the tail and other measurements and also indicated that in nominate *criniger*, at least, the head was *not* streaked in the breeding season. This called for comparison with specimens of other races and in the absence of material in Bombay, the British Museum (Natural History) lent us at our request specimens of *assamica* (12), *catharia* (7) and later *yunnanensis* (8). The American Museum of Natural History also assisted with another five from Wanhien, Central Szechuan, which according to the Times Atlas, is approximately 140 km. N.E. of Kangting (Tatsienlu) presumably the type locality of *catharia*.

Having got together some 80 specimens of several races, we thought it would be worthwhile recording some of our findings, relating mostly to the seasonal changes of plumage and tail measurements of the races occurring in India, which need to be appreciated for further work.

- (a) Adult males of all the races in India have in the breeding season a black bill contra-horny/yellowish in winter, and as is

visible at all seasons in the females and young males.

- (b) The males in all races are larger than females.
(c) Where both winter and summer specimens are available from the same place, males have their tails longer in summer though at the same time the females have them shorter than in winter.

nominate *criniger* tails

♂ ♂ summer (15) 81-108 av. 94 winter (3) 80, 83 & 87

♀ ♀ summer (5) 56-73 av. 65 winter (2) 76, 83
assamica tails

♂ ♂ summer (2) 103, 113 ♂ winter (1) 98

♀ ♀ summer (5) 54-80 av. 65 ♀ winter (1) 85

The first impression that the female has a shorter tail to enable her to sit inside the covered nest is countered by Stuart Baker's very definite statement in NIDIFICATION (2, p. 470) that the male also incubates a statement repeated in INDIAN HANDBOOK.

- (d) In winter, both sexes of *criniger*, *assamica*, *yunnanensis* and *catharia* have streaks on their heads which disappear in the breeding plumage leaving them almost unmarked brown or blackish in *assamica* and *yunnanensis*, where the streak marks have to be looked for.

- (e) If the relative wing measurement of the two sexes are considered, these birds fall into two distinct groups:

- (i) In *striatula*, *criniger*, *assamica* and *yunnanensis* the males have their wings 55-60 mm or more averaging about 14% larger than in the females which measure around 50 mm., and
(ii) In *cooki*, *catharia* and *parumstriata* (?) the males have their wings around 50 mm. and the females are about the same size or at the most 3 mm. (6%) smaller.

Accepting this difference in wing-size between the sexes as atleast of subspecific importance, the *catharia* group is excluded from Indian limits and *assamica* must be either a synonym of *yunnanensis* or distinct. Considering the fact that Stuart Baker when describing *assamica* referred to their being almost as dark as *yunnanensis*, we were inclined to accept this difference. There is no doubt however that he was confused to some extent, for the picture of the bird by the nest (Fauna 2 plate 7 facing page 520) shows a streaked head, i.e. in winter and not in summer plumage. Deignan (1942, p. 10) also refers to the streaking of feathers of the front, crown and nape in summer, though the streaking is then really lost. The same statement is repeated in INDIAN HANDBOOK (8, p. 72).

Harington while describing *yunnanensis* said that the winter plumage was unknown, but refers to the birds collected by Col. Rippon in March-April. Two of these dated 14 & 17 March 1902 (B.M. Nos. 1903-8-8-483 and 484) have streaked heads and are no doubt in winter plumage.

Seven skins of *criniger* received from B. M. are collected from different places in Szechuan, the type locality of *catharia*. Four of these are marked *parumstriata*, the type locality of which is Fukhian, about 3000 km. south east

of Szechuan on the eastern coast. As we do not have any topotypical *parumstriata* to compare with, all are left as *catharia*, together with the 5 from A.M.N.H.

With the literature and the specimens available, it is not possible to comment upon the identity or distribution of the birds from China, (other than from Yunnan) except that they show a lesser difference between the sexes in wing size, and prominent rufous edges to the primaries and secondaries which in some cases makes a rufous patch on the wings. This character is lacking in all the birds from India except 4 from Bhutan. Both *catharia* (8) and *parumstriata* (4) have their bills visibly smaller than in *criniger* and *assamica*.

In view of the several uncertainties referred above, we think it best to accept *assamica* until such time as the characters of wing size differences between the sexes, seasonal changes in tail size, and streaking on head are worked out with more material obtained in summer and winter. This decision does not burden the nomenclature, but only keeps the problem open for further study.

We are indebted to British Museum (Natural History) at Tring and the American Museum of Natural History, New York for the loan of the specimens from India and China.

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MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

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14. REMOVAL OF THE NORTHERN LEAF WARBLER, *PHYLLOSCOPUS TROCHILUS ACREDULA* (LINNAEUS) FROM THE INDIAN AVIFAUNA

The inclusion of the Northern Leaf Warbler, *Phylloscopus trochilus acredula* (Linnaeus) in the Indian avifauna is based on a single ♂ obtained by Salim Ali at Dediapada, Rajpipla, Gujarat on 29 March 1946 (Collector's No. GS 1137) and identified by Meinertzhagen and confirmed by Dr. James Harrison. The label is later marked *P. tytleri* and initialled DR (Dillon Ripley) but repeated as *P. trochilus acredula* (Linnaeus) in both INDIAN HANDBOOK (1973, 8: 134) and SYNOPSIS (1982). The 6th primary is emarginate and if the key in INDIAN HANDBOOK is accepted, this identification is erroneous and the bird has to be removed from the Indian list.

As we had just commenced with this notoriously difficult group, we thought it best to refer it to the British Museum (N.H.) whence Mr. Peter Colston confirms that the specimen B.N.H.S. No. 6112 (other details as above) is neither *trochilus* nor *tytleri* but, as we had suspected earlier, *P. trochiloides viridanus*. While the first mistake could have started with a slip in the writing or reading of *trochiloides*, the later identification as *tytleri* is inexplicable.

In any case it would appear fairly certain that the Leaf Warbler *P. trochilus acredula* No. 1572 in INDIAN HANDBOOK and SYNOPSIS is wrongly identified and must be removed from the Indian list.

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